



The Canberra Times  
**FOOD AND WINE**  
Wednesday, September 7, 2011

**STREET EATS**  
Recipes from Vietnam

We review Sage | Tuscan bean soup and stuffed cabbage – your last hurrah to winter | Chocolate torte from Guy Mirabella



# Streets ahead in Vietnam

Tracey Lister and Andreas Pohl share the secrets of street food in their adopted home of Hanoi, Kirsten Lawson writes

It's a typical muggy day in Hanoi, steaming after a tropical shower this morning, and Tracey Lister has been at the markets where, among her shopping, she bought live silkworms and baby ducks in their eggs.

Okay. To deal with the obvious first, the unborn ducks are for eating? Yes, the tourists and others attending this morning's cooking class at Lister's Hanoi Cooking Centre, are upstairs eating them as we speak.

They're a popular street food, Lister, an ex-Melburnian, explains over the phone. They're considered very good for you – loaded with calcium and protein, and for that reason, eaten by pregnant women.

You cook the eggs by boiling them until they've reached a weight that you can pick up easily with chopsticks, then crack them open, top with ginger, chilli and Vietnamese mint. The yolk is very rich and the baby duck quite well-formed, about 20 days old. The taste is a bit like liver, Lister says, unmoved by my suggestion that to some, this might border on the barbaric. "If my Vietnamese chef was here he'd say to you Australians eat kangaroo, how can you eat what you put on coat of arms?"

Well certainly, her husband Andreas Pohl comes in, it is confronting, and "I'm a little bit too squeamish to eat it myself". But protein is rare in Vietnam, where the staple is rice, and you need to find it where you can. This also explains the ubiquitousness of fish sauce. And the silkworms, which you buy live and saute them with lime leaves and chilli. The

texture is like broad beans, Lister says – crunch on the outside and creamy on the inside.

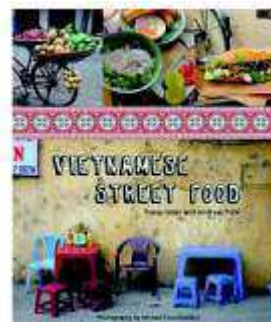
Other dishes at this morning's class on food from Hanoi and the Northern Highlands were seafood spring rolls, banana flower salad, pickled bean shoots and a sweet black sesame and coconut soup. This soup features in Lister and Pohl's new book, *Vietnamese Street Food*, and judging by the picture, it turns out black as ink – made of black sesame and peanuts, sugar, coconut milk and pandan leaves, with a swirl of white coconut milk in the top.

Silkworms are eaten as part of the Vietnamese "worker's lunch", which is like a street buffet, rice with a display of 15 or 20 other dishes – tofu, bamboo, roasted peanuts, fish in caramel sauce, silkworms and the like – from which you choose three or four.

At the other end of the street-food spectrum are stalls selling a single dish, day after day. Such as pho, the noodle soup that is probably Vietnam's most famous street food. But despite its fame, pho appears to have been invented relatively recently – early last century under the French influence (one theory is that the name is taken from the French "feu", as in pot au feu). Lister says a pho shop over the road from her cooking school sells 300 bowls before 11.30am.

So the Vietnamese eat breakfast on the street, then office workers head out to the street vendors for lunch, then pick up food for dinner at the markets on the way home – driving their motorbikes directly through the narrow gaps between stalls. Many people will visit the markets twice a day.

"A Vietnamese market is just





an amazing experience,” Lister says. “I go twice a day to our local market and it still blows me away just how fresh everything is, the prawns are alive, the eels are alive, the crabs, the frogs [the eels, crabs and frogs all from the rice paddies], herbs so fresh that when you snap them you can hear them snap.”

Lister says pork is the most popular meat, and without refrigeration, freshness is paramount, so the pigs are killed in the morning and brought directly to market. If they’re sold by 11am, there is a second kill.

“People often get a bit nervous coming to Vietnam – about the food and is it safe to eat,” she says. “For me, street food is the safest food to eat because it moves through so quickly. Nothing sits. If you really want to have the best food in Vietnam, that’s where you’re going to be eating.”

Lister and Pohl, who met backpacking in Greece, visited Vietnam in the 1990s, and Lister says she fell in love with Hanoi on that first drive in from the airport. So when Pohl was offered a job on an AusAid project in Hanoi in 2000, they jumped at the chance to return.

There, she met Vietnamese-Australian Jimmy Phan and the pair combined to open Koto restaurant, a project to employ street kids.

Lister is still involved in Koto, but now her main focus is the cooking school, opened in 2009. Here, she teaches Vietnamese dishes, but also runs international classes aimed at Vietnamese nationals, who might have travelled overseas



and returned with a passion for other cuisines – Mediterranean, in particular. The week we speak, Lister has taught a bread-making class brioche, onion focaccia, pita bread; and she also runs pasta classes.

She traces this interest in Western cooking partly to Vietnam’s growing middle class, and partly to its history of exposure to other cultures. One of the consequences of this is that Hanoi’s fastest growing street food is the doner kebab, which they say was introduced by a Vietnamese chef who worked in Germany and returned to open a kebab grill in 2005.

Cheese has become a gourmet item. And Pohl refers to another Vietnamese import – Czech beer houses and sausages – for which the Vietnamese workers in the former Eastern Bloc developed a fondness.

The French left their legacy in baguettes – this is one of the few South-East Asian countries where European-style bread is widespread. The book has recipes for baguette sandwiches,

filled with familiar Western fillings like beef, chicken, fish, omelette and pate, but typically, they’re made unmistakably Vietnamese with fish sauce, garlic, red shallots, chilli and coriander – as well as iceberg lettuce and cucumber.

The Vietnamese also have their own take on coffee, serving it with sweetened egg white floating on top of strong, hot coffee; or cold with yoghurt. Lister says this variation only works with the chocolaty bitter Vietnamese coffee and a tart yoghurt, drink served over ice. All of which makes for an unusual mix of international influence, because, as Lister says, the Vietnamese turn these imports into something unique. The doner kebab is made with grilled pork instead of halal lamb, and you’ll find it served with fish sauce.

She quotes a Vietnamese proverb: “Vietnam’s like a house with the doors open, the breeze will come through but in essence it doesn’t change anything in the house.”

Vietnam is also a house with

the doors open in a literal sense, judging from Lister and Pohl’s account of daily life.

“It sometimes seems that the Vietnamese conduct their daily life, if not exclusively on the sidewalk, then in plain view of the streets, throwing the doors to their living rooms open to the footpath. The distinction between public and private spheres is blurred when people wash their hair, clean dishes, conduct business or catch up with friends on the pavements of the cities.”

Where they also eat. But intriguingly, it seems street food is actually a relatively recent phenomenon – a result, Lister and Pohl say, of the independence was last century, when scores of people were displaced and needed to eat out, and then again of the economic changes in the late 1980s, when people worked longer hours and had to travel further to work.

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Clockwise from left: steamed rice noodles filled with pork and mushrooms (recipe overleaf); eating on the Vietnamese streets; and Andreas Pohl and Tracey Lister, authors of *Vietnamese Street Food*.



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Now, the street sellers are facing pressure from officials trying to tidy up the streets. But stall-holders resist attempts to drive them away by becoming highly mobile – like the woman selling chargrilled dried squid on a corner in Hanoi’s old quarter who plays cat and mouse with the police, quickly packing up her equipment and disappearing into a dark lane, only to reappear when the officials have left.

Lister and Pohl, from Australia and Germany, have embraced the local diet, as has their daughter, Franka, 6, whose favourites are sticky rice, rice noodles and tofu.

Pohl, who grew up on the mid-European diet heavy in potatoes and cured meats, says his favourite lunch is bun cha – chargrilled pork patties in a broth with cold noodles, and lots of herbs, ripped off the stem and placed on top – fresh and fragrant.

As for the rice-paddy eel, Lister and Pohl’s book offers two dishes. One involves chopping the eel finely then cooking it with garlic, red shallots, lemon-grass, chilli and five-spice powder for a couple of minutes, then adding fish sauce, sesame oil,

peanuts and coriander.

In the other, eel is cut into thin strips, rubbed with turmeric and chilli and deepfried. It’s served with cellophane noodles, sesame oil, fish sauce, mint, spring onions and peanuts.

“The Vietnamese distinguish between so-called ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ foods, which does not relate to temperature but to the idea of yin and yang. Eel is considered a ‘cold’ food, so to unfold its full health potential, it needs to be balanced with ‘hot’ ingredients – in this case, mint, pepper and chilli,” the pair writes.

There are variations in this book also on sticky rice. In a simple form, it’s just glutinous rice soaked overnight then rinsed well, then steamed with peanuts mixed through. To eat it, you make small balls and dip it into a mix of roasted peanuts and sesame seeds, crushed into crumbs with a pinch of sugar and salt. In another version, the rice is steamed with pounded fresh turmeric and served with fried shallots and shaved mung beans, which are made by cooking mung beans then shaping them into a large ball, which you can then shave.

All of which throws aspects of Australian food into a new

perspective.

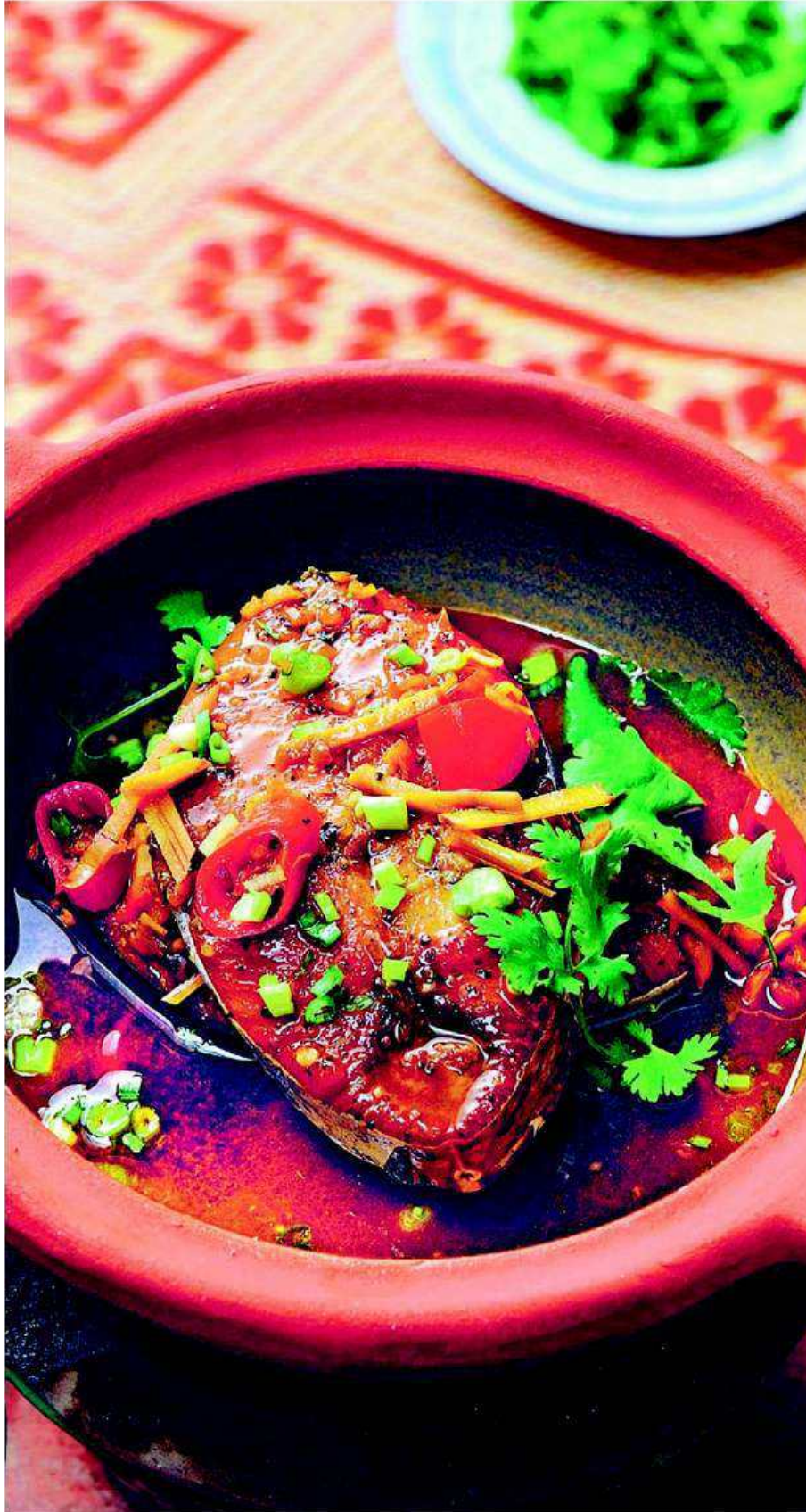
“Everything looks beautiful, everything’s bigger,” Lister says of Australian produce. “But there’s no flavour, we’ve really lost out in the flavour in Australian unfortunately, it’s all being supermarket driven.”

Having said that, Lister says availability of South-East Asian ingredients has improved markedly in the past 15 years and all of the dishes in their book can be made in an Australian kitchen. And while street food hasn’t been a feature of Australian eating, Lister points to a new program in Melbourne, called Streat, started by former Koto staff, in which street youth are trained in hospitality and preparing street food, like Korean pork and kimchi, to sell in the city.

But for now, home is Hanoi, not Melbourne, and Lister loves the vibrancy and optimism of her adopted country. “It’s a really lovely country just how exciting it is. You leave your house in the morning and you never really know what you’re going to come across in the course of a day. Everything’s handled with good humour. Things can go wrong, and they often do, but when things go wrong, people laugh and keep on going.”



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Caramel fish with galangal, typical of the southern beach town of Nha Trang



## Caramel fish with galangal – ca kho to

### Serves 6

The dish is prepared using carp at roadside stops in the Mekong Delta. Along Vietnam's almost 3000km coastline, it is made with mackerel. This version, which uses galangal and coconut milk, is typical of the southern beach town of Nha Trang.

**3-4 mackerel fillets, 2-3cm thick**

**3 red Asian shallots, finely diced**

**2½ tbsp fish sauce**

**¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper**

**1 ½ tbsp sugar**

**oil, for frying**

**150ml coconut milk**

**3cm knob galangal, peeled and cut into thick strips**

**1 long red chilli, cut into 5mm rings**

**pinch freshly ground black pepper, extra**

**4 spring onions, sliced**

**½ handful coriander sprigs**

Combine the mackerel with the shallots, one tablespoon of the fish sauce and the pepper and set aside to marinate for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, put the sugar and one-and-a-half tablespoons of water in a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Bring to the boil and cook until the sugar is a rich golden colour. Pour in 250ml of water, standing away from the pan. When the spluttering has stopped, stir until the caramel sauce is smooth.

Preheat the oven to 180C. Heat a little oil in a frying pan and brown the mackerel on both sides. Add the caramel sauce, coconut milk, galangal, chilli and remaining fish sauce. Bring to the boil, then remove from the heat.

Transfer the fish and sauce to a clay pot or casserole dish, cover and bake for 10 minutes. Remove the lid and bake for a further four to five minutes.

Serve the fish in the clay pot, sprinkled with the extra pepper, spring onions and coriander.

>> Recipes and images from *Vietnamese Street Food*, by Tracey Lister and Andreas Pohl (Hardie Grant, September 2011, \$39.95).



## Fried pork and quail egg dumplings – banh bao chien

### Makes 12

These hearty Chinese-inspired dumplings are usually served steamed. However, in the cold winter months they are often deepfried. We like to think of them as a Vietnamese version of the calzone.

#### Dough

**1 cup plain flour**  
**¼ tsp salt**  
**1 tsp dried yeast**  
**90ml lukewarm milk**

#### Filling

**12 quail eggs**  
**40g cellophane noodles**  
**200g pork mince**  
**2 spring onions, thickly sliced**  
**1 tsp fish sauce**  
**¼ tsp salt**  
**¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper**  
**oil, for frying**

To make the dough, put the flour and salt into a bowl and make a well in the centre. Whisk the yeast into the lukewarm milk. Pour into the well in the flour and make small circular motions with your fingers to incorporate the milk into the flour. Transfer the



dough to a floured board and knead until it is smooth and elastic. Place the dough in a clean bowl, cover with a damp cloth and put in a warm spot to rise.

Put the quail eggs in a saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to the boil, then cook for four minutes. Drain the eggs and run them under cold water to stop the cooking process. Peel the eggs and set them aside.

Cook the cellophane noodles in a saucepan of boiling water for two minutes. Drain and refresh under cold water. then cut the

noodles into 3cm lengths. Put the noodles in a bowl with the pork mince, spring onion, fish sauce, salt and pepper. Mix until well combined.

Lightly knead the dough on a lightly floured board to knock out the air. Divide the dough into 12 pieces, then roll each piece into a small disc.

Divide the filling into 12 portions. Flatten one portion of the filling in your hand. Place a quail egg in the centre and mould the pork around the egg to enclose it. Place the filling in the centre of the dough and press the edges to seal. Put the dumpling on the board with the seam touching the board and form a cup with your fingers around the dough. Make circular motions with the dough to firmly seal the dough and form it into a ball.

Heat the oil in a frying pan and cook the dumplings in batches for four to five minutes, or until golden brown, turning so they cook evenly. Drain well on a paper towel.



## Steamed rice noodles filled with pork and mushrooms – banh cuon

### Serves 6

These noodles can be quite tricky to make, but you can simplify the recipe by purchasing ready-made noodle sheets from the refrigerated section of an Asian supermarket. However, mastering the art of steaming your own noodles can be very satisfying.

**3 dried wood ear mushrooms**

**2 dried Chinese mushrooms**

**1 cup rice flour**

**½ cup tapioca flour**

**⅓ tsp salt**

**oil, for frying**

**3 red Asian shallots, finely chopped**

**4 garlic cloves, finely chopped**

**1 small carrot, finely diced**

**250g pork mince**

**2 tsp fish sauce**

**⅓ tsp sugar**

**⅓ tsp freshly ground black**



### pepper

**1 tbsp fried shallots (see below), to serve**

**classic dipping sauce (see recipe below), to serve**

To make the fried shallots, peel and thinly slice eight red Asian shallots lengthways. They should all be the same thickness so that they will cook evenly. Pour vegetable or peanut oil for deep frying into a wok or saucepan and

heat until it is hot but not smoking – so a piece of shallot sizzles when it hits the oil. Cook the shallots half at a time, stirring them carefully, until golden brown. Remove and drain.

Soak the mushrooms in warm water for 20 minutes. Drain the mushrooms and squeeze out any excess water. Remove the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Meanwhile, prepare the batter



by combining the rice flour, tapioca flour and salt in a large bowl. Add 500ml water and whisk to form a smooth batter. Set the batter aside while you prepare the filling.

Heat the oil in a small frying pan and cook the shallots and garlic until fragrant. Add the diced carrot and cook for one minute. Add the pork, fish sauce, sugar and pepper and cook until the pork has coloured. Finally, add the mushrooms and cook for one minute. Remove the mixture from the pan and set aside.

Lightly oil a baking tray. Fill a saucepan with water. Stretch a muslin cloth over the saucepan until it has a drum light tension. Secure it with string. Bring the water to the boil, then spoon a ladleful of batter into the centre of the cloth. Use the smooth side of the ladle to spread the batter into a small circle using a circular motion. Cover with the saucepan lid and steam for 20 seconds. Remove the lid and carefully

transfer the rice noodle to the prepared tray.

Spoon two tablespoons of the pork mixture on to the centre of the rice noodle. Fold in the sides, lift the end closest to you, fold it over the pork mixture and roll up. Place on a platter and repeat until all the ingredients are used.

Scatter over the fried shallots and serve with the classic dipping sauce.

Classic dipping sauce –  
nuoc cham truyen thong

**3 tbsp fish sauce**

**100ml lime juice**

**1 tsp rice vinegar**

**½ cup sugar**

**2 garlic cloves, finely chopped**

**1 long red chilli, finely chopped**

Combine the fish, sauce, lime juice, rice vinegar and sugar in a small bowl. Stir until the sugar has completely dissolved. Add the garlic and chilli.